



Virginians' Attitudes Toward Emergency Preparedness & Lessons Learned

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Study Background

The Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM) contracted with the VCU Center for Public Policy to conduct a telephone survey with a random sample of adult Virginians. The survey questions were included in the Commonwealth Poll conducted June 17—July 8, 2005.

The final sample consisted of 801 respondents. The questions asked on behalf of VDEM dealt with: respondents' ratings of their knowledge about various types of emergencies; the preparations they had made for emergencies; what they would do in specific emergency situations; the information sources they used to find out about emergency preparedness; and their needs and preferences for emergency training programs.



Preparedness Knowledge

Respondents were asked to rate their personal knowledge about preparing for four different types of emergencies on a scale of on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “I know almost nothing at all,” and 5 being “I know almost everything I need to know.”

Weather-Related Emergencies (Hurricanes/Blizzards): 3.95 Average

72 percent of respondents rated their knowledge level a 4 or 5

Flash Flood: 3.35 Average

48 percent of respondents rated their knowledge level a 4 or 5

Toxic Chemical Spill: 2.36 Average

21 percent of respondents rated their knowledge level a 4 or 5

Terrorist Attack: 2.38 Average

32 percent of respondents rated their knowledge level a 4 or 5



Preparations Made for Emergencies

- Disaster Plan: 55 percent said they had a disaster plan for their family or household to follow in the event of an emergency
- Key Contact: 79 percent said they had a key contact outside the home whom the members of their family or household knew to contact in the event of an emergency
- Meeting Place: 52 percent said they had a predetermined location outside of their immediate area where the members of their family or household could meet in the event of an emergency
- Supplies for Special Needs: 70 percent of the respondents who reported they had pets, infants, seniors, or people with disabilities in their household indicated that they had supplies ready at home for them.



Emergency Supplies on Hand

- Extremely Common: extra batteries (93 percent), canned food (97 percent), a manual can opener (97 percent), and a flashlight (99 percent).
- Very Common: bottled water (83 percent), a battery-powered radio (83 percent), a first aid kit (87 percent).
- Common: extra supply of prescription and non-prescription medication (58 percent), extra cash/traveler's checks (61 percent).
- Water Supply (based on 1 gallon per person, per day for 3 days): 62 percent had three days or less; 44 percent had two days or less; 22 percent said their water would last one day or less; 10 percent had more than one week.
- Central Supplies Location: 60 percent did not have their emergency supplies gathered together in one location in the home.



Actions Taken in Emergencies

- Tornado Warning: 70 percent said they would go to the basement or the lowest point in the building; 24 percent said they would go to the center of the building and take shelter in a closet.
- Tornado Warning While in Car: 46 percent said that they would leave the car and lie flat in the nearest ditch; 21 percent said they would take cover under a bridge or overpass; 20 percent said they would head for the nearest building to take cover.
- Water-Covered Roadway While Driving: 88 percent said they would turn around and use an alternate route.



Elderly & Low-Income Preparedness

- Weather-Related Emergencies: While 72 percent of all respondents rated their knowledge level a 4 or 5
 - Only 56 percent of those 65 or older said 4 or 5
 - Only 55.5 percent of those with incomes under \$35,000 said 4 or 5
- Bottled Water: While 83 percent of all respondents said they had bottled water on hand
 - Only 76 percent of those with family incomes between \$20,000 and \$34,999 said they had it
 - Only 63 percent of those with family incomes under \$20,000 said they had it



Other Significant Results

- Tornado Drills at Work: 68 percent had never had a tornado drill at work; 24 percent had.
- Information Sources Used in to Prepare for Emergencies (respondents could choose all that applied): Brochures (18 percent of all mentions); previous experience/common sense (16 percent of all mentions); and textbooks or reference books (14 percent of all mentions).
- Needs and Preferences for Emergency Training: 53 percent were very interested or somewhat interested in attending an emergency response training program if it cost \$25. Of those who answered something other than “very interested”, 64 percent very interested or somewhat interested if the program was free of charge.
- Type of Free Training: Of the people who said they were very or somewhat interested in attending free training, 61 percent said their preferred training method was with a live instructor.
- Training Time: 36 percent would spend less than five hours, 29 percent would spend 5-9 hours; 10 percent would spend 10 to 14 hours.



Key Lessons Learned

- An opportunity exists to better educate Virginians about preparing for emergencies with which they have less experience, such as flash floods, toxic chemical spills and terrorist attacks.
- Better outreach is needed to nearly half of the population who doesn't have a Disaster Plan or Meeting Place.
- Elderly and low-income people often indicated that they were less knowledgeable and (especially for low-income people) less prepared than other populations, so better outreach is needed there as well.



Key Lessons Learned Continued

- Outreach is needed to improve the percentage of Virginians who have a three-day supply of water, one of the most critical disaster supplies. We also need to encourage residents to keep their supplies in a central kit so that can be gathered and used quickly in an emergency.
- More than one in five respondents would shelter under an overpass or bridge during a tornado. As this would be a dangerous thing to do, an opportunity for public education exists here as well. Adult tornado drills could help with this, as adults can forget the lessons they learned as children.

